WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A method for delivering short-time duration video segments to terminals via a communications network, the method comprising:

activation of a video object on a screen using a remote control for a terminal;

transmission from the terminal to a session manager of a request for a video segment corresponding to the object;

receipt and processing of the request by the session manager;

transmission of a control message from the session manager to a transport stream generator;

transmission of the video segment from the transport stream generator to the terminal; and

presentation of the video segment on the screen starting at a beginning of the segment.

2.   The method of claim 1, wherein the video segments are delivered as part of an interactive program guide.

3.   The method of claim 1, wherein the communications network comprises a cable distribution network.

4.   The method of claim 3, wherein a headend of the cable distribution includes the session manager.

5.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

composing a video sequence incorporating the video segment in an window smaller than and overlaying the screen; and

encoding the video sequence,

where said transmission of the video segment comprises transmission of the video sequence incorporating the video segment.

6.   The method of claim 1, wherein said transmission of the video segment includes inserting a demand-cast video stream incorporating the video segment into a multiplexed transport stream to be delivered to the terminal.

1   7.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   transmission from the terminal to the session manager of a release message

3 when the terminal is no longer presenting the video segment.

1   8.   The method of claim 7, further comprising:

2   tracking by the session manager of video segments currently being

3 acquired by at least one terminal.

          9.   The method of claim 1, wherein a plurality of video segments are transmitted from the transport stream generator to a plurality of terminals, wherein a data structure for representing the plurality of video segments includes a plurality of streams, and wherein each stream comprises a group of pictures (GOP) having a first picture and one or more remaining pictures.

          10.   The method of claim 9, wherein the data structure comprises:

          a first set of one or more elements for representing data for the first pictures in the plurality of GOPs, wherein each of at least one element in the first set represents data for at least a portion of the first picture of a respective GOP encoded as a reference I picture, and wherein each of remaining elements in the first set represents data for at least a portion of the first picture of a respective remaining GOP encoded as either a difference picture or a P picture; and

          a second set of one or more elements for representing data for the one or more remaining pictures in the plurality of GOPs, wherein each element in the second set represents data for at least a portion of a particular remaining picture in one of the plurality of GOPs encoded as either a P picture or a B picture, and

          wherein each of the plurality of streams is represented by one or more elements in the first set and one or more elements in the second set.

          11.   The method of claim 10, wherein each video segment occupies at least a portion of the GOP that includes the video segment.

          12.   The method of claim 11, wherein the first picture for each of the plurality of GOPs having an unduplicated video sequence is encoded as a reference I picture.

1   13.   The method of claim 11, wherein each picture of the pluralilty of

2   GOPs includes

3   a first portion indicative of textual information, and

4   a second portion indicative of video information.

1   14.   The method of claim 13, wherein the first and remaining pictures in

2   the plurality of GOPs share a common first portion.